



The Park & Recreation Commission's objective for the Pear Tree Improvement Project:

The goal of the project is to enhance the recreational facilities at the park while preserving the natural beauty of the beach. The plan creates gathering places for the community to meet and to enjoy the park year-round.

FAQ

1. What, exactly, is currently being proposed for Pear Tree Point Beach?

The property, buildings and facilities at Pear Tree Point Beach are worn and in dire need of repair or replacement. The last major improvement at Pear Tree Point Beach was in 1978, **over 40 years ago**.

For photos showing the current state of the park and its structures: [CLICK HERE](#)

For a photo of the facility that was there in the 50's, 60's until it burned in the 70's: [CLICK HERE](#)

The current proposal is to undertake one comprehensive project that will address all of the problems with Pear Tree Point Beach. The Proposal includes:

- Replacing the existing 41-year-old structure with a new, ADA-compliant, multipurpose facility that will house a food concession, rest rooms, and a covered flexible community space,
- New decks (one at ground level near the gazebo and an elevated deck overlooking the beach),
- Expanding the width of the south beach by 5 feet and the west or "back" beach by 18 feet,
- Renovation of the parking lot to replace the cracked and broken asphalt and to correct the grading and pitch issues (which will improve run-off following storms and high-tide events),
- An update of the picnic area,
- Planting of low grasses/vegetation at edge of beach & parking lot to enhance sustainability of beach,
- Planting of additional trees at selected locations on west and south beaches (locations tbd),
- Rebuilding the boat ramp to correct the pitch issues.

For plans and renderings: [CLICK HERE](#)

2. Why not renovate the existing building?

The proposed plan calls for renovation of the existing bathhouse and replacement of the existing concession building.

Most of Pear Tree Point Beach is in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood zone VE15. FEMA limits the amount of money that can be spent renovating an existing, non-compliant building in zone VE15 to 50% of the appraised value. The '50% rule' does not apply to new construction within a VE15 zone built in compliance with FEMA regulations.

The total appraised value of the combined existing bathhouse and concession structure is \$193,400 which limits us to a renovation budget of \$96,720. Our preliminary plan estimates this to be the cost of renovating the bathhouse alone.

Replacing the existing concession building with a new elevated building enables the town to make more impactful, long-lasting and fully FEMA compliant improvements, unconstrained by the 50% rule.

3. Why a two-story building? Won't it be an eyesore that blocks views?

As explained above, the new raised structure provides a true multi-purpose facility that complies with today's building codes and is FEMA and ADA compliant. Several residents have asked questions about the impact of a two-story building in place of the current one-story building.

The new building will be superior to the existing structure in every respect, and the physical dimensions are strikingly similar. Compared to the existing buildings, the proposed building has a sloped roof which is 1.6 feet taller at the lowest part (facing the parking lot) and approx. 7.5 ft taller at the highest point (facing west towards the water).

The current proposed plan positions the new elevated structure roughly within the footprint of the existing concession structure. This plan also retains the existing bathhouse, while reducing its size and height, and upgrading all interior fixtures.

For visual comparisons of the size of the current structure and the new building (the shaded area being the current structure: [CLICK HERE](#)

4. Why a new building (with an elevator) in an area susceptible to flooding?

The entire Pear Tree Point Beach property is in a flood zone, and has been considered by FEMA to be in flood zone since the inception of flood regulations in Darien. Elevators are allowed in flood zones, with the provision that the elevator not be at the ground floor while the elevator is at rest. Elevators are especially important at Town-owned public facilities such as the one proposed. Recently, both the Noroton Yacht Club and Tokeneke Club buildings included elevators in their plans.

Many properties in Darien are within the flood zone (Noroton Bay is an example of an area in which nearly all properties are in the flood zone). One common misconception is that development and construction is not allowed in the flood zone. Actually, that is untrue. Construction is allowed if at the proper elevation (at least one foot above the base flood elevation), and with certain certifications from a professional engineer.

The elevation of the site is comparable to Noroton Bay and other Darien waterfront areas, and the new building is being constructed to comply with current building codes and FEMA regulations.

This means that the building, for example, will be constructed of materials designed to weather coastal conditions, and will have purpose-designed electrical and mechanical systems. In other words, it will be built to the same (or higher) standards as a coastal home.

The architect is in the process of identifying an elevator designed for use in coastal settings. The proposed elevator will be housed in a weather-tight structure and remains in the raised position when not being accessed from the ground.

An additional key objective of the project is to implement solutions to reduce flooding of the parking lot during full/new moon high tide and flood events. This will include installation of an in-line check-valve in the storm drain at the edge parking lot and west beach to prevent water backing up into the parking lot at extreme high tide.

5. Why an elevator?

Earlier designs considered ramps to provide access to the new upper level in addition to stairs. Feedback suggested that ramps would have a noticeable effect on sightlines and views to the harbor. Instead, the most recent approach proposes the incorporation of an elevator to provide handicap access. Stair access is also proposed to provide access to the second level of the building.

6. Does the plan call for long ramps to navigate from the beach to the upper level of the proposed structure?

As indicated above, along with stairs, ramps were considered in earlier design proposals, but were thought to have a noticeable effect on sightlines/views out to the harbor. The most recent approach proposes the incorporation of an elevator to achieve ADA accessibility along with stairs.

7. What is the purpose and impact of the "flexible community program space?"

The "flexible community program space" is a ~600 sq. ft. space on the upper level that will be covered and have windowed walls that open. A rendering of this space is here: [CLICK HERE](#)

The purpose of this space is to provide a comfortable, covered, "rain or shine" way for residents to enjoy the beach. There will be ample seating for families and seniors, allowing residents and their guests to informally meet for lunch or snacks during the summer season. In season, all beachgoers will have access to the community space during the park's hours of operation.

In the off-season, we plan to allow a limited number of events to be held in the community space, with the reservation fees going to offset the overall operating expenses. This ability to reserve the community program space will be ***strictly limited to Darien residents and organizations*** and a Darien Parks and Recreation staff member will be on duty during all use of the room.

8. How long has this plan been under consideration?

This project was planned to commence after completion of the Weed Beach renovations in 2009 and due to budgetary and other reasons, it was placed on hold. In 2017, the Parks and Recreation Commission undertook the development of a master plan for our town's parks and beaches. Based upon input from town residents and the result of random sampling carried out by an independent consultant, the renovation of Pear Tree Point Park became a priority. The project plan you see today is the result of two years of study and analysis.

9. Will Pear Tree Beach have berms that will block the view of the beach/water from your car?

Berms are not being recommended part of the proposal. Beachgoers will continue to be able to enjoy the views of the beach from their cars as they currently do.

10. How much will all of this cost?

Cost estimates for the new building's construction and renovation will be presented at the Building Committee meeting at 6 pm on October 9 at Darien Town Hall. Estimates for the repair of the boat ramp, parking lot renovation, landscaping and other site elements are being prepared, with a date for publication still to be finalized.

11. Have FEMA and DEEP approved building the proposed structure in a VE15 zone?

We are working with FEMA and DEEP to ensure that all requirements are met. The approval process is continuing, and to date, no aspect of the plan has been flagged as a “show-stopper” by either regulatory body.

12. Is the beach at Pear Tree at risk of eroding away?

Based upon information provided by DEEP, there is no indication that the beach is eroding. Instead, there is evidence that sand appears to be accumulating between the breakwaters/jetties.

13. Are any town zoning variances required?

Yes - the current plan calls for 2 variances. The first is to allow for construction of portions of the new building within the required setbacks. The new building is proposed to be constructed roughly within the footprint of the existing non-compliant structures. The second is to allow for the size of parking stalls at the beach to remain the existing size as opposed to the slightly wider size required under current town regulations (8.5-inch-wide parking spaces in lieu of 9 feet wide – a difference of 6 inches). The Building Committee will be applying to ZBA for consideration on these items.

14. Isn't the beach to be experienced with 'toes in the sand'?

True, being on the sand is a great way to experience the beach. But generally speaking, being on the sand means being in the sun, and for more and more people, prolonged exposure to sun poses health risks particularly in the form of skin cancer. The proposed flexible community program space, with large doors allowing it to be transformed into an open-air space, will provide a wonderful alternative for beachgoers to enjoy the beach, protected from the effects of the sun. The space will also allow those with special needs a more accessible place to enjoy the facility.

15. What approvals are required before building can commence?

The process for securing final approval to proceed with construction is lengthy and rigorous, requiring detailed presentations to approvals from multiple town, State and/or Federal agencies with jurisdiction over the project. These include the town's Zoning Board of Approvals, Architectural Review Board, Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Representative Town Meeting. Along with, The State of CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Darien Parks & Recreation Department

Mission Statement

The mission of the Darien Parks & Recreation Department is to nurture active and passive recreational activities within existing Town parklands; to maintain clean and attractive facilities and to adjust and expand both the recreational programs and parklands to meet the recreational requirements of all residents in a cost-effective manner.

The primary goal of the Department is to provide an environment which promotes and encourages the enhancement of individual lives through the social, physical, mental and emotional benefits of participation in physical activity or passive involvement within parks.